

**House Report 108-243 - DEPARTMENTS OF TRANSPORTATION AND
TREASURY AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS BILL,
2004**

**ADDITIONAL VIEWS OF THE HONORABLE MARTIN OLAV
SABO**

Across the federal government, the experienced workforce is fast graying and approaching retirement age. Nowhere is this concern more evident than in Federal Aviation Administration air traffic control (ATC) services.

Over a number of years, I have closely monitored this FAA workforce and urged the FAA and General Accounting Office to analyze trends and making policy recommendations to ensure viable federal ATC operations for years to come. The safety consequences of an inadequate ATC workforce are simply unacceptable.

According to the most recent GAO analysis of FAA air traffic control needs, thousands of the FAA's more than 20,000 air traffic controllers will be eligible for retirement by 2011.

Of the 8,200 en-route air traffic controllers, many are already eligible for retirement. By 2006, 26 percent of these en-route controllers will be eligible to retire. By 2011, that percentage will increase to 65.

It takes time and resources to train experienced and trustworthy workers in this critical, high stress job. We must take the long view to ensure an adequate supply of quality air traffic controllers, regardless of whether the commercial aviation industry is experiencing a short-term economic downturn.

A very cost-effective source for well-trained en-route air traffic controllers is the Mid-America Aviation Resource Consortium. Not only is the MARC program the only post-graduate school in the country specializing in training en-route air traffic controllers, it has a fine reputation of recruiting women and minorities into this workforce. Further, the federal retention rate for MARC en-route controller graduates is very high.

For 13 years, the committee explicitly funded the MARC program. Unfortunately, that support is absent from the bill this year. Therefore, I offered an amendment in full committee to provide \$2 million to continue operations support for the MARC school.

During committee discussion, the Chairman noted a distinction between air traffic controllers' eligibility for retirement and actual retirements. There is

room for honest debate about the retirement rate. However, no one should dispute that there is a bow wave of retirements coming for FAA air traffic controllers, and we will continue to need to train new ones in the near and long term.

The MARC air traffic control school is a great success story--for Minnesota and the nation. It cost-effectively trains talented young men and women to keep us safe every time we fly.

While I withdrew my amendment in committee, it would be shortsighted to allow this vital program to lapse, and I will continue to press for MARC funding as the bill moves forward.

MARTIN OLAV SABO.